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DOI: <https://doi.org/10.1075/sl.34.2.01iem>

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ZORA URL: <https://doi.org/10.5167/uzh-81740>

Journal Article

Accepted Version

Originally published at:

Iemmolo, Giorgio (2010). Topicality and differential object marking : Evidence from Romance and beyond. *Studies in Language*, 34(2):239-272.

DOI: <https://doi.org/10.1075/sl.34.2.01iem>

Topicality and differential object marking: Evidence from Romance and beyond*

Giorgio Iemmolo

Abstract

The present paper investigates the relationship between dislocation and differential object marking in some Romance languages. As in many languages that have a DOM system, it is usually also assumed that in Romance languages the phenomenon is regulated by the semantic features of the referents, such as animacy, definiteness, and specificity. In the languages under investigation, though, these features cannot explain the distribution and the emergence of DOM. After discussing the main theoretical approaches to the phenomenon, I will analyse DOM in four Romance languages. I will argue that DOM emerges in pragmatically and semantically marked contexts, namely with personal pronouns in dislocations. I will then show that in these languages the use of the DOM system is mainly motivated by the need to signal the markedness of these direct objects as a consequence of being used in (mainly left) dislocation as topics (cf. English “As for him, we didn't see him”). Finally, the examination of comparative data from Persian and Amazonian languages lends further support to the advocated approach in terms of information structure.

* Acknowledgements: I am indebted to Francesca Di Garbo, Anna Giacalone Ramat, Elisa Ghia, Gerson Klumpp, Anna Siewierska, and those in attendance at the I Transalpine Typology Meeting at the University of Bern and the XIX Conference on Historical Linguistics at Nijmegen's Radboud University for valuable comments and constructive criticism on earlier versions of this paper. I also gratefully thank two anonymous reviewers and journal editor Balthasar Bickel, who motivated me to articulate some of my points more clearly. Special thanks go to Riccardo Tromba for statistical support, and Sonia Cristofaro and Elisa Roma for their encouragement and helpful discussions. Any remaining errors and inaccuracies are my own.

Keywords: differential object marking, information structure, transitivity, dislocations

1. Introduction

This paper examines the relationship between differential object marking (DOM) and topicality in Old and Modern Sicilian and some less-studied Romance languages, including Northern Italian, Gallo-Italian dialects, two French varieties, and Catalan.

Differential object marking, also known as *Prepositional Accusative* in Romance linguistics, is a variation in the encoding of direct objects, whereby only a subset of direct objects receives overt marking.¹ Following previous research on the phenomenon (Bossong 1985, Bossong 1991, Bossong 1998, Comrie 1979, Comrie 1989, among others), it is usually assumed that DOM is mainly regulated by the semantic properties of the referent of the noun phrase filling the role of direct object, such as animacy and definiteness. These properties are usually represented through hierarchies (Croft 2003: 130):

- Animacy: human > animate > inanimate
- Definiteness: definite > specific indefinite > non-specific indefinite
- Person: first, second > third

In this paper, I will present data on Romance languages, and I will argue that there are cases in which the development or the synchronic variation of DOM is better explained by the topicality of the direct object (detected through dislocation, insofar as dislocations are topic-marking constructions); this contrasts with previous accounts according to which DOM is due only to the semantic properties of the direct object referent.

¹ In this paper, “overtly marked” is used to refer to the explicit structural coding, while

This paper is organized as follows. Section 2 is devoted to a discussion of the functions of case marking with particular reference to DOM. I will argue that previous explanations proposed for DOM are not very compatible with the data from some languages; hence a unified explanation applicable to these languages is necessary. The approach to DOM in Nikolaeva & Dalrymple (2006) is then introduced and some problems are discussed that arise when this approach is applied to the data from Romance languages. In Section 3, the contexts are described that trigger overt marking for direct objects in Romance languages. Section 4 deals with the analysis of the status of overtly marked direct objects in terms of information structure; a correlation will be proposed between the role of primary topic and DOM. In section 5 comparative data from Persian and a number of Amazonian languages are presented. Lastly, in the final section the major findings of the work are evaluated in comparison with previous approaches to DOM.

2. Differential object marking: some theoretical issues

It has long been assumed in linguistic theory, and particularly in functional typology, that case marking for core arguments can have two main functions (Song 2001: 156; Siewierska & Bakker 2008: 291). One such function is the “distinguishing” or “discriminatory” function (Comrie 1989; Dixon 1979, Dixon 1994, among others), that is, case marking used on core arguments of transitive clauses in order to allow the hearer to distinguish the subject/agent (A) from the direct object/patient (O).² In this view, the use of case marking is minimal, as its

“marked” is used for the semantic/conceptual complexity.

² I will use the labels S, A, and O (see Dixon 1979) for the syntactic functions of the only argument of an intransitive clause, the first argument of a transitive clause, and the second argument of a transitive clause respectively.

only function is to differentiate between agents and direct objects. Thus, in transitive clauses, usually only one of the two core arguments receives case marking, while the other argument remains unmarked. It is also possible for both of the arguments to receive different case markings, such as in the Latin declension case system. By contrast, marking the only argument of an intransitive predicate (i.e. the intransitive subject) is unnecessary, as such an argument cannot be confused with other arguments in the clause.

The second function of case marking is “that of indexing properties of the referents of arguments or of the clause itself” (Siewierska & Bakker 2008: 292). A good example of this approach is the model for transitivity put forward by Hopper & Thompson (1980) and, more recently, by Næss (2004) and Næss (2007). In this approach, case marking indexes semantic or pragmatic properties such as animacy, definiteness (often subsumed under the label of individuation), and telicity. DOM has received increased attention over the last decades, because it is a widespread phenomenon cross-linguistically, and because it lends itself to be analyzed in both of the two approaches described above. In the discriminatory approach, DOM has been assumed to reflect the marked status of definite and animate objects with respect to indefinite and inanimate ones. According to the functional-typological literature (e.g. Bossong 1985, Comrie 1979, Croft 1988, among others), prototypical transitive constructions are assumed to consist of a volitional agent, usually animate and definite, and a direct object which is fully affected by the action carried out by the agent, while being less animate and definite than the agent;³ “any deviation from this prototype should be marked” (Comrie 1989: 128).

³ Cf. Comrie (1989: 128): “The most natural kind of transitive construction is one where the A is high in animacy and definiteness, and the P is lower in animacy and definiteness; and any deviation from this pattern leads to a more marked construction [...] The construction which is more marked in terms of information flow should also be more marked formally.”

When both agents and objects share the same semantic properties, and other clues for identifying the NP syntactic role are not found in the clause, additional strategies – such as case marking – are required in order to allow for the correct interpretation of grammatical relations. Thus, in the sentence *Mary has broken the bottle*, there is no problem in assigning the correct grammatical relations, as the agent is the animate and volitional NP while the direct object is the inanimate and affected NP. Since the event described by the clause is consistent with the prototype for transitive events, no overt marking is required to identify the grammatical relations in the clause. Problems arise, however, when the NPs with similar properties are found in the same clause, namely when the properties of the direct object resemble those of the agent (i.e. high animacy and definiteness). In such a case, overt marking may be used for the direct object.

The approach discussed so far originates from the typological markedness theory elaborated by Greenberg (1966) and Croft (2003), in which marked forms express marked meanings. As far as DOM is concerned, this means that inanimate and indefinite objects are *conceptually* unmarked with respect to agents, insofar as they are easily distinguishable from the agents. The presence of an additional morphological marker on objects that are high in individuation iconically signals the semantically marked status of these objects with respect to objects low in individuation. This type of case marking is thus economical, as no overt marking is required when there is no need to disambiguate between the NPs.

DOM seems to fit nicely into this explanation: In many DOM systems, only human, animate or definite objects are overtly marked, whereas non-human, inanimate, and indefinite ones are left unmarked. In Awtuw (Feldman 1986: 110), for example, the direct object is case-marked for the accusative only if it ranks equally with or outranks the agent along the Animacy hierarchy, as in (1a, b):

(1) Awtuw (Sepik: Ramu)

(a) *tey tale-re yaw d-oel-i*

3F.SG woman-ACC pig FAC-bite-PST

“The pig bit the woman”

(b) *tey tale yaw d-oel-i*

3F.SG woman pig FAC-bite-PST

“The woman bit the pig” (Feldman 1986: 106)

Similarly, direct objects occurring in imperative clauses are not overtly marked in Finnish because there is no overtly expressed agent (Comrie 1975).

By contrast, in the indexing approach, the presence of a marker on some direct objects is regarded as a means of highlighting either the semantic role that the object holds in the situation described by a transitive event, or properties of inherently salient NPs, namely individuation and affectedness (Siewierska & Bakker 2008: 292). Among the ten parameters of transitivity listed by Hopper & Thompson (1980), a crucial role is played by both the individuation and the affectedness of the object participant. These two features are regarded as typical of objects in prototypical transitive clauses. As Hopper and Thompson put it: “it seems to us that the tendency to mark just definite/animate Os reflects the purer objectness of such Os, and simultaneously marks the higher transitivity of the clause as a whole [...]. These facts suggest that there may be a correlation between case-marking and the cognitive perception of ‘prototypical’ transitive events” (Hopper & Thompson 1980: 291).

In this view, only “genuine” objects are case-marked, whereas indefinite and inanimate objects are not overtly marked or expressed in formally intransitive constructions or incorporated (cf. Mithun 1984). The marking of animate and definite objects would thus serve to distinguish between prototypical and less

prototypical members of the class of transitive events.

More recently, Næss (2004) and Næss (2007) have proposed a new model for DOM, in which the crucial property that triggers overt marking for direct objects is affectedness as opposed to subject/agent control. According to Næss (2004: 1206) “objects that are positively specified for affectedness take the accusative case, while objects that are non-affected take no marking”.

The explanation is supported for example by the data from Chukchi. In this language, when the object is non-referential, it is usually incorporated and occurs preverbally. Moreover, the verb takes the intransitive suffix, as in (2b):

(2) Chukchi (Chukotko-Kamchatkan)

(a) *Tumg-e na-ntawat-ən kupre-n.*

friends-ERG set-TRANS net-ABS

“The friends set the net”

(b) *Tumg-at kopra-ntawa-gʔat.*

friends-NOM net-set-INTR

“The friends set nets” (Comrie 1973: 243-244, in Hopper & Thompson 1980: 257)

As pointed out by Song (2001:156), however, both “indexing” and “distinguishing” case functions are often essential when accounting for case-system variation both across and within languages. Following Malchukov (2008: 209), Næss (2004), and Næss (2007), I make the assumption that the two functions of case marking can be considered to be two competing motivations. In some languages, e.g. Awtuw (ex. 1a, b), case marking is used only for disambiguation in particular contexts, while in other languages case marking reflects the semantic properties of inherently salient direct objects, e.g. affectedness (as proposed by Næss and Hopper and Thompson). Animate and/or definite entities are perceived

as more prominent in human discourse (that is they are more eligible to be the centre of attention, as predicted by the empathy hierarchy) and are therefore marked overtly. The Chukchi examples fit this case function very well.

The views outlined above, however, present a number of problems. For example, as it will be seen below, the discriminatory view fails to explain why DOM in Romance languages starts from personal pronouns, the only nominal category which retained a case distinction. If the presence of overt marking on some objects is motivated by the need to assign the correct syntactic role to the NPs in the clause, it is very unlikely for such a marking to have begun with personal pronouns. Indeed, there is no need to overtly mark a category that already carries a marker (such as the opposition between *io* “I” and *me* “me” in Italian). Moreover, as it will be shown in section 3, DOM does not appear to depend on the degree of affectedness of direct objects in many Romance languages.

2.1 Differential object marking and topicality

The idea that the information status of the direct object may be the source of DOM systems has been repeatedly proposed in Romance linguistics. For example, Niculescu (1959: 182) defines object marking in Romance as a “modalité syntactique obligatoire destiné à marquer l'objet direct personnel, individualisé (défini, déterminé) et mis en relief du point de vue stylistique”, where “stylistique” should be understood as “pragmatic”. The idea that topicality could be considered the triggering factor for DOM to appear and extend has also been claimed by Pensado (1995), stating that DOM arose from the topicalization of direct and indirect objects (Pensado 1995: 203).

More recently, Nikolaeva & Dalrymple (2006) have proposed a new model for DOM. In their view, DOM is the grammatical coding of the information structure

role of secondary topics. When the direct object is a secondary topic, there is a strong tendency to mark its pragmatic role grammatically across languages, by means of either verbal affixes (agreement) or case marking, as for example in Ostyak. Nikolaeva & Dalrymple's (2006) account of DOM also involves indexing. In their view, the explicit marking of some direct objects is a means of signaling the "similarities between subjects and direct objects" (Nikolaeva & Dalrymple 2006: 1), in that both subjects and objects share the information status of topic, although to differing degrees.

The relevance for DOM to semantic properties such as animacy and definiteness is further explained by the fact that these features are sufficient for DOM or secondary topic marking when the construction starts to grammaticalize. As pointed out in the literature, animate entities are more relevant in human discourse than inanimate ones, and new arguments, once they have been introduced to the discourse, increase in definiteness and therefore topicality (Givón 1984).

However, the idea that DOM is a strategy to mark secondary topics is quite problematic in the light of the various data from Romance languages that we will analyze in the following section. In these languages, DOM is first attested in left-dislocations of personal pronouns. Before discussing Nikolaeva & Dalrymple's (2006) model and analyzing our data, a discussion of the concepts of topic, topicality, and left dislocation used in the remainder of the paper would seem to be of use.

2.1.2 Basic notions

Lambrecht (1994: 5) defines information structure as the component that serves to create a pragmatically structured proposition. A pragmatically structured proposition reflects the speaker's assumption about an addressee's state of

knowledge at the time of an utterance. Within information structure, Lambrecht distinguishes two main categories, presupposition and assertion. Presupposition is defined as the portion (or better, the set of propositions) that a speaker assumes an addressee already knows, while assertion is the proposition “which the hearer is expected to know as a result of hearing the sentence uttered” (Lambrecht 1994: 52). This distinction underlies the concept of topic adopted throughout the paper.

Lambrecht (1994: 127) defines topic as the referent that the proposition is about. Topic elements are discourse referents about which a speaker asserts something relevant. Usually, they are given information that is prosodically de-accented, identifiable, activated or accessible, definite,⁴ (Chafe 1976) and within the scope of pragmatic presupposition. The aboutness relation is also due to the contextual topicality⁵ (or relevance/salience, see Lambrecht 1994: 55) of a referent in the discourse, which Lambrecht (1994: 55) defines as “the degree to which a referent can be taken to be a center of current interest with respect to which a proposition is interpreted as constituting relevant information”. It is worth recalling that Lambrecht distinguishes between topic, which corresponds to a pragmatic relation, and topic expression, which represents the linguistic or grammatical coding of the topic (Lambrecht 1994: 131). As already proposed by Givón (1984) for ditransitive clauses, and Lambrecht (1994), the topic relation is not obligatorily

⁴ Obvious reasons of space force me to disregard the intricacies of the relationship between definiteness and topicality. Generally speaking, definite NPs are used as topics when a speaker thinks that a hearer is able to identify a referent within a possible range of referents: In other words, definite NPs are often given, available within a register, and identifiable (Givón 1983, Chafe 1976: 39, Lambrecht 1994: 79 ff.). In contrast, indefinite NPs are quite rarely used as sentence topics, insofar as they are more difficult to identify and are usually new, being introduced for the first time into the discourse. Of course, the correspondence between topicality and definiteness is often an imperfect one. For example, while identifiability (one of the main properties of topicality) is presumably a universal category, its grammatical expression, i.e. definiteness, may be lacking in a particular language (Lyons 1999: 279).

⁵ Throughout the paper, topicality will be used to refer to both 1) the relevance/salience of a referent within discourse and 2) the possibility for an expression to be the topic of a clause.

unique in a sentence. Indeed, more than one referent can be under discussion at the time of utterance (Nikolaeva & Dalrymple 2006: 6). We can therefore recognize a primary and a secondary topic within multiple topic sentences with the primary topic being the aboutness topic discussed above. In contrast, the secondary topic is defined in relation to the primary topic. Nikolaeva (2001: 26) defines it as the “entity such that the utterance is construed to be about the relationship between it and the primary topic” (Nikolaeva 2001: 26). Consider the following examples (Lambrecht 1994: 148):

(3) a: *Whatever became of John?*

b: *He married Rosa.*

c. *But he didn't really love her.*

In (3b), the subject “he” is the topic and the direct object “Rosa” is part of the focus. In (3c) both the two unaccented pronouns “he” and “her” are topic expressions, but to different degrees. The sentence in (3c) primarily conveys information about John (thus being the primary topic), but adds information about Rosa as well by informing the addressee about the relation (already established in (3b) that holds between the two topic referents, in this case that Rosa is not loved by John (Lambrecht 1994: 148). As stated by Nikolaeva (2001: 12), sentences with “multiple topics may be ordered with respect to their pragmatic saliency”: in (3c), the subject is more salient (i.e. topical) than the direct object. This ordering results in the distinction, previously proposed by Givón, between primary and secondary topics. The primary topic can be identified through “its pragmatic relation to the respective proposition” (Nikolaeva 2001: 27). In contrast, the secondary topic can be defined not only through its relation to the proposition, but also through its relation to the primary topic. These two pragmatic functions are mapped differently onto syntax: Generally, in the unmarked information structure of the clause, the

primary topic is closely associated with the grammatical relation of subject/agent, while the direct object exhibits a split, in that it tends to appear in the clause either as part of the focus or as the secondary topic. Nikolaeva further observes that direct objects are singled out as secondary topics only if their relation with the subject is salient enough to be under discussion at the time of utterance (Nikolaeva 2001: 40). This would explain the split between the secondary topic and focus associated with the grammatical relation of direct object.

This pattern is consistent with the situation predicted by Givón (1983), who argues that arguments higher up on the case hierarchy are likely to be topics, while arguments lower down on this hierarchy tend to correlate with focal positions.

There are however a number of problems to this approach with respect to DOM. I will discuss them briefly. First of all, as an anonymous reviewer pointed out, in naturally occurring discourse, clauses are often too short to have a primary topic, a secondary topic, and a focus. For instance, Hopper & Thompson (2001) show that the majority of clauses in conversational English have only one participant. Furthermore, as we have already mentioned, this pattern does not fit the data from Romance languages. In Romance languages, DOM first appears within left dislocation. Left dislocations (also called detachment constructions, cf. Lambrecht 1994) are marked syntactic constructions used to promote or re-introduce a topic referent “in the form of a lexical noun phrase which is placed in a syntactically autonomous or ‘detached position’ to the left [...] of the clause which contains the information about the topic referent” (Lambrecht 1994: 182). Usually, the dislocated element is represented within the clause by a pronominal element coreferential with the dislocated NP. As pointed out by Lambrecht, dislocated constituents are external to sentence boundaries and resumptive clitic pronouns represent the topic for the predication. When the referent is not sufficiently

accessible, the new topic is (re)-introduced through a dislocated full lexical NP.⁶ Introducing the new topic directly to the clause, however, would violate the so-called “Principle of the Separation of Reference and Role” (PSRR, Lambrecht 1994: 185), which states: “Do not introduce a referent and talk about it in the same clause”. In this model, the dislocated NP announces the topic for the predication (or signals a shift in the topic), while the clitic resumptive pronoun is the actual topic expression of the sentence. As suggested by Nikolaeva (2001: 15), in dislocated sentences, the secondary topic is “encoded by pronominal clitics that may be anaphorically related to clause external expressions (that is, the dislocated NP, GI)”. Afterwards, she claims that “clause external secondary topic is especially typical of Romance languages” (Nikolaeva 2001: 40). Therefore, it appears that both the dislocated NP and the resumptive clitic share the same information status. However, the idea that left-dislocated constituents are secondary topics is challenged by various facts. Firstly, it seems intuitively clear that, from a pragmatic point of view, sentences with a left-dislocated constituent are primarily interpreted as conveying information about the dislocated NP, insofar as they signal a shift in attention from one topic referent to another. Consider the following passage (*Aime, Diario Dogon*, quoted from Andorno 2003: 91):

(4) Si vede fin dal primo momento che lo *status di guida* è ambito, in quanto dà accesso a un contatto privilegiato con gli stranieri. [...] In realtà, anche nei giorni in cui non ci sono visitatori, *le guide, le vedi ciondolare davanti al campement*, Ø sfoggiando scarponi nuovi e abiti alla moda regalati loro dai turisti.

“It is immediately obvious that being a guide is a much coveted status as it brings

⁶ As noticed by Lambrecht, announcing a new topic via LDs is not equivalent to introducing a new referent into a discourse, insofar as the new topic has already a high degree of topicality or salience in the discourse (and must also be identifiable, definite or

natives into close contact with foreigners [...]. As a matter of fact, the guides can be seen hanging around the campsite (lit. the guides, you see them hanging around the campsite) even when there are no visitors, showing off their new boots and fashionable clothes given as a gift by tourists.”

In (4), the left-dislocated NP “le guide”, resumed by the clitic “le” is interpreted as what the sentence is about. It seems counterintuitive, from a pragmatic point of view, to construe the sentence as being about the relation that holds between two topics. If we apply one of the standard tests for topic-hood, e.g. the “say about” test to the dislocated sentence, we will get the following paraphrases:

(5) a. *Le guide, le vedi ciondolare davanti al campement.*

b. *He said about the guides that you see them hanging around the campsite.*

c. **He said about you that you see the guides hanging around the campsite.*

(5a) is the sentence to be tested, (5b) and (5c) are the two possible paraphrases of (5a). However, only one of the two, namely (5b), is the right paraphrase. The aboutness topic (therefore the primary topic) of (5a) is identified by (5b) and is the “guides”. Obviously, it should be noticed that left-dislocated constituents fulfill a different function than “normal” primary topics, in that they primarily have a topic-announcing or topic-shifting function (see Gregory & Michaelis 2001). Nonetheless, there do not appear to be arguments in favor of their secondary topic status.

In the remainder of this paper, I will attempt to demonstrate that DOM is a strategy that emerges in pragmatically and semantically marked contexts, namely personal pronouns in (mainly left) dislocation contexts. DOM systems in these

languages are supposed to be motivated by the need to signal that the relevant direct objects are atypical 1) at the pragmatic level, insofar as they are primary topics and 2) at the semantic level, because they are high in animacy and definiteness. I will then show that the grammaticalization of the relevant constructions can take two directions, as postulated by Nikolaeva & Dalrymple 2006: 30-31):

1. DOM may be extended to non-topical objects which share features of topic-worthiness, as in Modern Sicilian. In this way, the link with information structure is lost or at least weakened.

2. DOM may be restricted to topical objects only, as in Catalan.

3. Differential object marking in Romance languages

In the Romance language family, many languages show DOM, including e.g. Spanish, Sardinian, Romanian, and a number of Southern Italian dialects. In this paper, I will concentrate on some less-studied Romance languages and varieties, such as Northern Italian, Gallo-Italian dialects,⁷ two French varieties, Catalan, and Sicilian. While in Northern Italian, Gallo-Italian dialects, and the French varieties DOM is at an incipient stage, Catalan and Sicilian exhibit a more articulated system. As will emerge in the remainder of this section, topicality will turn out as an important notion for understanding and explaining DOM, because in these languages DOM is primarily triggered by the topical status of the NP which fills the role of direct object.

3.1 Northern Italian and Gallo-Italian dialects

⁷ Northern Italian refers to the regional varieties of Italian spoken throughout Northern Italy and Canton Ticino (Switzerland). The label “Gallo-Italian dialects” refers to the dialects

In the literature on the topic, DOM has been traditionally considered to be absent from both Standard and Northern Italian and Gallo-Italian dialects of Northern Italy (cf. Rohlfs 1971). In the last decade, however, some studies have convincingly demonstrated that DOM is also well attested in these Italian varieties and dialects (Berretta 2002, Nocentini 1985). The data from Northern Italian used for this study have been collected from various sources. Some examples are taken from Berretta (2002) and naturally occurring spontaneous speech (many examples were overheard); others have been constructed and checked with a representative sample of Northern Italian speakers (14 individuals, all from Northern Italian families). The data from Gallo-Italian dialects have been elicited through questionnaires.⁸

DOM in Northern Italian is quite limited. It is fundamentally restricted to first and second-person pronouns in dislocated position with an (optional) resumptive pronoun within the clause, as in (6), (7), and (9). The topical status of the NP *a me* in (6) is demonstrated first by its being outside the scope of the negation, as shown by (6, 7, 9). The impossibility of omitting the preposition demonstrates its grammaticalized status, as in (8):⁹

(6) Context A: She said that she saw four people trying to pick the lock on her front door.

spoken in the same area (e.g. Lombard, Piedmontese, Ligurian, etc).

⁸ The questionnaire used in this study was a collection of sentences I asked native speakers to translate or judge with respect to their grammaticality.

⁹ Actually, as is pointed out by Berretta, the preposition can be omitted, but only if the clause has a strongly contrastive meaning. For example, in *TE non sopporto più, non lei*, if the preposition were to be omitted, the resumptive clitic would be no longer possible, and the preposed NP would be a contrastive focus bearing prosodic stress. Moreover, the no-longer left-dislocated status of *te* is confirmed by the fact that the NP occurs in pre-clausal position (i.e. it is internal-clause) and it is an obligatory argument of the verb. This is not true for left-dislocated constituents, which are clause-external and freely omissible without causing agrammaticality of the remaining sentence (see Lambrecht 2001: 1052). However, this use is not common in Northern Italian at all, and native speakers feel the use of a cleft sentence to be more natural in this case, i.e. *E' TE che non sopporto più, non lei!*

A me, non (mi) convince questo

ACC me NEG CLIT.1SG convince:PRS.1SG this

“This does not convince me” (overheard)

(7) *Se a te non (ti) disturba*

if **ACC** you NEG CLIT.2SG disturb:PRS.3sg

“If it does not disturb you” (Berretta 2002: 126)

(8) **Me non mi convince questo*

me NEG CLIT.1SG convince:PRS.1SG this

“This does not convince me”

(9) *A te, non ti sopporto più!*

ACC you NEG CLIT.2SG tolerate:PRS.1SG longer

“I cannot stand you any longer” (overheard)

Berretta (2002: 130) has observed that DOM in left dislocations is also a device used to mark the beginning of a new conversational turn, and carries a topic shift function within discourse. The topic shift function, however, is already carried out by the use of the stressed form of the personal pronoun (the only possible method in dislocated contexts, as in 10) instead of the unstressed (clitic) counterpart (11):¹⁰

(10) Context: It took long time for them to call for that work! I'm very depressed...

A me, mi hanno chiamato

ACC me CLIT.1SG AUX.3PL call:PTCP.PST

subito

¹⁰ Obviously, the topic shift function of the stressed form of the pronouns is not the only function that such pronouns perform in discourse. Nonetheless, this is one of the main functions of the opposition between stressed and unstressed pronouns in Italian. In terms of referential strength, unstressed forms are indeed used for referent continuity, while stressed forms are used for referent shift or re-introduction. For instance, in (11) the direct object is continuous and represented by the clitic form of the pronoun. In contrast, in the example (10) there is a shift, marked by both the use of the stressed form and the object marker. Similarly, if the subject is continuous, it is expressed via inflection and there is pro-drop.

immediately

“They called me immediately” (overheard)

- (11) *Mi hanno chiamato subito*
CLIT.1SG AUX.3PL call:PTCP.PST immediately

“They called me immediately”

There are some cases in which the NP introduced by the preposition is a third person pronoun (both singular and plural, as in (12, 13) or a proper name, as in (14). Such occurrences however are very rare and marginal, but they suggest that DOM is extending the animacy hierarchy downwards, provided that the overtly marked objects are topical:

- (12) *A loro, le aspettava Adone*
ACC them CLIT.3PL.F wait:PST.3SG Adone

“Adone was waiting for them” (Berretta 2002: 127)

- (13) *?A lei, non la aspettano*
ACC her NEG CLIT.3SG.F wait:PRS.3PL

“They don’t wait for her”

- (14) *A me, mi aspettano alla stazione*
ACC me CLIT.1SG wait:PRS.3PL at the station

“They are waiting for me at the station” (Berretta 2002: 127)

- (15) *??A Mario lo ha sempre*
ACC Mario CLIT.3SG.F AUX.3SG always

fatto ridere

make:PTCP.PST laugh:INF

“He always made Mario laugh”

When there is a shift, or a new subject is introduced, the stressed form of the pronoun or a full NP must be used.

(16) *A me, (mi) fa arrabbiare*
 ACC me CLIT.1sg make:PRS.3SG get angry:INF
la sua arroganza!
 the his arrogance
 “His arrogance makes me angry”

DOM is also possible in right-dislocation contexts, as in (17). However, these occurrences are considered to be very rare and sociolinguistically marked.¹¹

(17) *come ci vedranno adesso, a noi?*
 how CLIT.1PL see:FUT.3PL now ACC us
 “How will they see us now?” (overheard)

It is now worth examining the typology of verbs that takes DOM in Northern Italian. Following previous observations by Berretta (2002), two main classes can be identified. The first class includes transitive psychological predicates, such as *convincere* “convince”, *persuadere* “persuade”, *preoccupare* “worry”, *disturbare* “disturb” (see ex. 6, 7, 8, 9). The second class includes causative verbs (*fare/lasciare* with infinitive complements, as in 15, 16). Further verbs that do not fall into either of these categories are *aspettare* “wait for”, *vedere* “see”, and *chiamare* “call” (ex. 10, 11, 17). For verbs belonging to the first and second groups, DOM appears to be obligatory only if the direct object is a dislocated first or second person pronoun.

As a conclusion to this section, some data on DOM from Northern Italian dialects are presented: Contrary to current views on the topic (cf. e.g. Berretta 2002: 360), DOM is also found in some Northern Italian dialects. In these varieties,

¹¹ DOM in right-dislocation is used mainly in low diastratic varieties of the language. Moreover, it is also possible to find marked objects modified by additive, scalar, and exclusive particles such as *(ne)-anche*, *solo*, and *perfino*, provided that the objects are pronouns. The presence of DOM in these cases could be explained by the fact that these

DOM is similarly restricted to personal pronouns in left-dislocation contexts, just as in Italian:

- (18) *A mi tratar-me in sta manera?*
ACC me mistreat:INF-CLIT.1SG in this way?

“But why treat me like this?” (Trieste, Friùli Venezia-Giulia; Rohlfs 1971:

63)

- (19) *a te- i t ciamen*
ACC you CLIT.SUBJ CLIT.2SG call:PRS.3PL
semper
 always

“They always call you” (Modena, Emilia Romagna)

- (20) *a otre i va ciamà*
ACC you.PL CLIT.SUBJ CLIT.2PL call:PRS.3PL
hemper
 always

“They always call you” (Ono S. Pietro, Lombardy)

The picture of DOM in Northern Italian varieties and dialects can be summarized as follows: For non-topical, focal objects, DOM does not occur at all. In dislocated constructions (usually left-dislocated), DOM appears only with personal pronouns (preferably first and second person) governed primarily by psychological and causative verbs.

3.2 Catalan

Usually, Catalan is assumed to have DOM only in limited contexts, such as personal pronouns, the universal quantifiers *tothom* and *tots*, “all”, the relative

particles apply their meaning to the (contrastive) topic of the clause (cf. König 2001: 755).

pronoun *el qual*, and when the object pronoun appears in a reciprocal construction, as in (21).¹² As noticed by Escandell-Vidal (2007), however, DOM occurs also with other NP classes in the spoken language, but only if they are dislocated (preferably in left position; direct objects in right detached position are considerably less frequent, as in 22, 23, 24):

- (21) *Jo t'ajudo a ti i tu*
 I CLIT.2SG-help:PRS.1SG ACC you and you
m-ajudaras a mi'
 CLIT.1SG-help:FUT.2SG ACC me
 “I help you and you will help me” (Escandell-Vidal 2007: 24)

- (22) *No estima en Joan*
 NEG love:PRS.3SG the Joan
 “She/he does not love Joan”

- (23) *An en Joan no l'estima*
 ACC the Joan NEG CLIT.3SG-love:PRS.3SG
 “As for Joan, she/he does not love him”

- (24) *No l'estima, an en Joan*
 NEG CLIT.3SG-love:PRS.3SG ACC the Joan
 “She/he does not love Joan” (Escandell-Vidal 2007: 29-30)

The distribution of DOM varies, depending on diatopic factors: in Peninsular Spoken Catalan DOM, is compulsory in dislocated constructions with personal pronouns, proper names, kinship terms, and common nouns (the latter provided that they are human and definite, cf. Escandell-Vidal 2007: 35):

- (25) (a) *A ta mare, la vaig vore*

¹² DOM is held as a Castilianism: In Standard Catalan, its use is strongly discouraged (cf. Badia 1994, a prescriptive grammar of Catalan). Meier (1947), however, quotes passages

ACC your mother CLIT.3SG.F AUX.1SG see:INF

ahir

yesterday

(b) *Vaig* *vore* **a* *ta* *mare*

AUX.1SG see:INF **ACC** your mother

“Your mother, I saw her yesterday” (Escandell-Vidal 2007: 31)

(26) *an* *questa senyora,* *no* *la* *conec*

ACC this lady NEG CLIT.3SG.F know:PRS.1SG

“This lady, I don't know her” (Rohlf s 1971: 70)

(27) *an* *es* *pobres,* *Diu* *els* *ajuda*

ACC the poor ones God CLIT.3PL.M help:PRS.3SG

“The poor ones, God helps them” (Rohlf s 1971: 70)

In contrast, DOM in Balearic Catalan may also occur with inanimate direct objects, provided that they are definite or at least specific and dislocated (Escandell-Vidal 2007: 35), as in (28, 29). The definiteness constraint appears to be motivated by the topical status of the dislocated constituents. Indeed, indefinite expressions do not usually occur in topic-marking constructions, such as dislocation. The language, however, displays some cases in which an indefinite direct object is dislocated and introduced by the preposition, as in (30).¹³

(28) *An* *es* *ganivets,* *els* *vaig*

ACC the knives CLIT.3SG.M AUX.1SG

ficar *an* *es* *calaix*

put:INF to the drawer

“As for the knives, I put them in the drawer” (Escandell-Vidal 2007: 31)

from Old Catalan texts in which DOM appears with proper nouns as well.

¹³ As Escandell-Vidal points out, many informants reject the use of the preposition before

(29) *A ses pomes, mengemmos les*
 ACC the apples eat:IMPER.1PL CLIT.3PL

“As for the apples, let’s eat them” (Rohlf 1971: 70)

(30) *A un gelat, me lo*
 ACC one ice.cream, me CLIT.3SG.M
prendria amb molt de gust
 take:COND.PRS.3SG with much of pleasure

“As for ice cream, I’d really love to have one” (Escandell-Vidal 2007: 33)

In summary, DOM is compulsory with personal pronouns and some other NP classes in both Standard Peninsular and Balearic Catalan. DOM appears again with other NP classes provided that they are dislocated, a fact that suggests that (primary) topicality is the main triggering parameter, along with referent animacy (Peninsular Catalan) and definiteness (Balearic Catalan). The situation found in Catalan suggests that the grammaticalization of the construction has caused its narrowing to topical objects. Catalan has grammaticalized the tendency for DOM to appear in topic-marking constructions, in that virtually every direct object, if dislocated, can be overtly marked.

3.3 French varieties

Along with Standard and Northern Italian, French is considered one of the Romance languages in which DOM does not appear at all. In actuality, however, the Brussels and *Languedoc* (Toulouse, Bordeaux) varieties of French do in fact display DOM. The presence of DOM in the latter region may be due to the

indefinites. Therefore, the example (32) is considered agrammatical by some speakers.

influence of Gascon, which has a DOM system (cf. Rohlfs 1971). DOM in the Brussels French variety seems to be an independent development. In *Languedoc* French, DOM only appears in dislocated constructions with resumptive pronouns in the clause, as in (31, 32, 33); object marking sporadically extends to human common nouns, as in (34):

(31) *à moi, personne ne me veut*
 ACC me nobody NEG CLIT.1SG want:PRS.3SG
 “Nobody wants me” (Hills 1920: 220)

(32) *à lui, on ne l'-a pas voulu*
 ACC him IMPERS NEG CLIT.3SG.M-AUX.1SG NEG
 want:PTCP.PST
 “As for him, they didn’t want him” (Rohlfs 1971: 68)

(33) *à ton père, je l'-ai vu*
 ACC your father I CLIT.SG.M-AUX.1SG see:PTCP.PST
 “As for your father, I saw him” (Rohlfs 1971: 68)

(34) *Il le va blesser, à cet enfant*
 He CLIT.3SG.M AUX.3SG injure:INF ACC this child
 “He is going to injure this child” (Rohlfs 1971: 68)

In Brussels French, DOM is limited to dislocated personal pronouns, just as in Northern Italian (35, 36). Unlike in Italian, however, the resumptive clitic pronoun is mandatory and the object marker is present with both singular and plural personal pronouns (37):

(35) *à lui, on ne le attendait pas*
 ACC him IMPERS NEG CLIT.3SG.M wait:PST.3SG NEG
 “We would not wait for him”

(36) *Je la suivais, à elle*

I CLIT.3SG.F follow:PST.1SG ACC her

“I followed her” (Hills 1920: 220)

(37) *Il nous regardait toujours, à*

He CLIT.1PL looked:PST.3SG always ACC

nous

us

“He always used to look at us” (Hills 1920: 220)

Rohlf (1971: 71) provides some examples of DOM from the *patois* of the French-speaking area of Switzerland (Valais, Geneva). In this dialect as well, DOM is similarly restricted to dislocated personal pronouns (38, 39).

(38) *no t'-in yu, a te*

we CLIT.2SG-AUX.1PL see:PTCP.PST ACC you

“We have seen you” (Rohlf 1971: 71)

(39) *a te t'-an proeu yu*

ACC you CLIT.2SG-AUX.3PL enough see:PTCP.PST

“We have seen enough of you” (Rohlf 1971: 71)

Also in this variety, the correlation between dislocation and the possibility of marking the dislocated item with the preposition is attested.

3.4 A historical example: DOM in Old Sicilian

In this section some diachronic evidence from Old Sicilian is provided in support of the idea that, in addition to animacy and/or definiteness, topicality is a main triggering factor for DOM.

The data that will be presented in the following were collected in a corpus study of Old Sicilian, carried out on material from six 14th-century texts. A total of 1280

direct objects was collected and subsequently inserted into a database in which all of the direct objects were tagged according to the following parameters: presence of object marker; humanness and animacy; definiteness; pronouns; proper names; number; telicity; topicality (detected in texts through dislocations).

The study aimed to determine the factors which affect the object marking distribution in early written texts in Old Sicilian, and verify whether a link can be found in Sicilian as well between the topical status of direct objects and their differential marking (see Iemmolo, forthcoming (a) for further information). The raw percentages and numbers of direct objects found in the corpus are summarized in Table (1).

Table (2) provides a statistical analysis of the parameters and interactions between parameters within the corpus. In these statistics, the interactions of the parameters “pronoun” and “proper noun” with other parameters have been excluded insofar as they constitute a subclass of the animacy parameter. The most parsimonious model includes the effects given in Table (2); no other factors or interactions reached significance (that is, $p\text{-value} < 0.05$)

Parameters	DOM	Non-DOM	% of DOs
<u>PRONOUNS</u>	<u>83.55%</u> <u>(127)</u>	<u>16.45% (25)</u>	<u>11.88%</u>
PROPER NOUNS	70.75% (358)	29.25% (148)	39.53%
NUMBER (SING)	56.96% (626)	43.04% (473)	76.02%
ANIMACY	60.67 % (739)	39.33% (479)	95.16%
DEFINITENESS	64.81% (641)	35.19% (348)	77.27%
<u>DISLOCATED DOs</u>	<u>88.51%</u> <u>(154)</u>	<u>11.49% (20)</u>	<u>13.59%</u>
TELICITY	54.41% (216)	45.49% (181)	31.02%
SUM	60.08% (769)	39.92% (511)	100.00%

Table 1: Percentages and numbers of direct objects

Parameters	P-value	Odds Ratio	Low 95% CI	High 95% CI
DISLOCATED DOs	0.00	15.99	5.49	46.55
PRONOUNS	0.00	3.76	2.27	6.22
DEFINITENESS + SINGULAR	0.01	2.65	1.30	5.42
PROPER NOUNS	0.00	2.15	1.57	2.94
DEFINITENESS + DISLOCATIONS	0.01	0.22	0.06	0.73

Table 2: P-values and odds ratios for only significant parameters and interactions

Statistically, if a direct object is dislocated or is a pronoun, DOM is likely to appear. The distribution of the prepositions is illustrated in the following examples from Old Sicilian. To begin with, DOM is not compulsory for pronouns and proper names as in (40) and (41), although it is well attested:

(40) *chachau a mi de lu soy allipergu*
 chase:PST.3SG ACC me from the his house
 “He threw me out of his house” (DIAL 7, I, 19)

(41) *Et lu re Pollinestor auchisi a lu*
 and the king Polymnestor kill:PST.3SG ACC the
dictu Pollidoru
 mentioned Polydor
 “And King Polymnestor murdered the above-mentioned Polydor”
 (ENE, III.48)

Secondly, neither animacy nor definiteness alone can motivate DOM, due to the lack of a strong statistical correlation between these two parameters and the presence of the preposition.¹⁴ Indeed, there are many occurrences in which indefinite non-specific direct objects are overtly marked (as well as examples of overtly marked inanimate direct objects). It is very often the case that the same NP

¹⁴ However, as pointed out by an anonymous reviewer, there is nonetheless a preference for

can be overtly marked and then unmarked in the same passage, as in (42):

- (42) *sintendu lu rimuri di li armi et di lu strepitu*
 hear:GERUND the noise of the weapons and of the clamor
di killi genti, chi vulianu auchidiri lu Conti
 of those people who wish:PST.3PL kill:INF the Count
illu valentimenti difisi a lu Conti.
 he courageously defend:PST.3SG ACC the Count

“Hearing the noise of the weapons and the clamor of those who wished to kill the Count, he courageously defended the Count”

Similar observations apply to the telicity parameter. In both Old and Modern Sicilian, the role of telicity appears to correlate rather negatively with the presence of the object marker, i.e. there is no strong correlation between telicity and object marking. In the following examples, the direct object is overtly marked in the first case (43; notice that the NP is a kinship term) and unmarked in the second (44, where the NP is a proper name of a divinity, “Christ”):

- (43) *Hercules auchisi a lu figlu di Vulcanu*
 Hercules kill:PST.3SG ACC the son of Vulcanus

“Hercules murdered the son of Vulcanus” (ENE VIII.33)

- (44) *Et inperzò non est mirum si dampnata*
 and so NEG be:PRS.3sg strange if damned
genti la quali auchisi Cristu innocenti, a
 people REL.SG.F kill:PST.3sg Christ innocent to
fururi si muvissi
 violence IMPERS move:PST.3SG

“And so, one should not be surprised if the very same damned people,

the marker to appear when the direct object is animate and definite.

who killed the innocent Christ, would turn to violence” (SPOS. 2,2,73)

As mentioned above, the strongest correlation in Old Sicilian is between DOM and topicality (detected through dislocation): Of 174 dislocated direct objects, only 20 are unmarked. The main word orders found in the texts are O(S)V (with anaphorical elliptical subjects) and OVS with full NPs as subjects. Any NP type can be dislocated: The main restriction is that the NP has to be animate and referential (the role of animacy depends on the general condition for the presence of the object marker, whereas the referentiality of the NPs has to do with the difficulty of topicalizing indefinite or non-referential NPs). However, many detached NP are represented by pronouns (61 of 154 occurrences):

- (45) *Et ad issu medemmi tuctu lu Senatu lu*
and ACC him really all the Senate CLIT.3SG.M
acumpagnau intra lu Capitoliu.
accompany:PST.3SG into the Capitol
“And as for him, all the senators accompanied him into the Capitol”
(VAL MAX 319.70)

- (46) *Et a cti li segreti cammari di li nostri*
and ACC you the unknown rooms of the our
dei ti aspectanu
gods CLIT.2SG wait:PRS.3PL
“And the unknown rooms of our gods are waiting for you” (ENE
VI.135)

Like Old Sicilian, Modern Sicilian uses DOM. DOM is obligatory with personal pronouns, proper names, and singular kinship terms; the object marker is instead optional with plural kinship terms and human common nouns. No marking is

allowed with (in)animate and indefinite non-specific nouns (unlike Old Sicilian).¹⁵ Contrary to the situation found in Old Sicilian, in which DOM is triggered firstly by (primary) topicality and secondly by animacy/definiteness, DOM is triggered in Modern Sicilian mainly by humanness along with definiteness/referentiality. Marking of (left)-dislocated direct objects is still widespread, but restricted to the NP classes overtly marked in a non-dislocated position. As in Old Sicilian, no role is played by telicity.

Modern Sicilian well exemplifies the spread of DOM to direct objects which have topic-worthiness features; marking is now applied to direct object regardless of their informational status. When the DOM system begins to loosen its link with information structure, the informational status of the component loses importance as the grammaticalization process goes on, and DOM becomes mainly regulated by merely semantic factors such as animacy and definiteness (this happens because topical objects are usually definite, see Iemmolo (forthcoming, b) for further information on the grammaticalization of DOM in Sicilian).

4 Discussion

The following conclusions can be drawn from the analysis of DOM in different Romance languages. In languages with “incipient DOM” (Northern Italian, Gallo-Italian dialects, and French varieties) only personal pronouns (and sporadically kinship terms and proper names) are case-marked with the preposition *a* when they are in dislocated position and constitute the primary topic of the clause. The situation found in Catalan is of particular interest as the marking of focal objects (that is, direct objects in postverbal position) is only restricted to pronouns and

¹⁵ There are a few occurrences where the marked NP denotes a pet. This usage is however very marginal.

some other minor NP classes, whereas the marking of other NP classes is only allowed when they are dislocated. This shows a narrowing of object marking to topical objects alone. The patterns found in both Old and Modern Sicilian are different with respect to the role of dislocation and topicality: While early Old Sicilian texts exhibit a strong correlation between DOM and topicality, Modern Sicilian has extended marking further down the animacy hierarchy, thus showing a bias towards the marking of topic-worthy referents. The study thus adds further evidence to the role played by information structure in shaping morphosyntactic structure (cf. Comrie 2003, among others).

4.1 Differential object marking and topicality: A reassessment

The data discussed in the paper provide evidence in support of the idea that topicality can be a relevant factor in the emergence and development of DOM. The fact that none of the varieties examined marks focal direct objects (except for both Old and Modern Sicilian and Catalan, see above) makes it clear that it is indeed topicality that triggers DOM.

This work also confirms the hypothesis that DOM reflects the marked status of these direct objects (in the typological sense of the notion of markedness, as defined e.g. in Croft 2003) and serves as a distinguishing device. The marked status is clear at both the syntactic and the information structure levels: At the syntactic level, markedness is reflected firstly in the use of a dislocated construction, as a marked device to (re-)introduce or promote a referent to topic position usually in turn management (cf. Lambrecht 1994: 153 and, specifically for Italian, Duranti & Ochs 1979).¹⁶

¹⁶ Cf. Lambrecht (1994: 337) “The relationship between an information-structure category and a formal category is determined by the principle of markedness, where the marked

At the information structure level, the markedness of topical direct objects is reflected by the syntactic markedness of the direct objects: in the *unmarked pragmatic sentence articulation* (Lambrecht 1994: 132), the role of **primary topic** is usually associated with the **subject**, whereas the **direct object** can be either (a part of the) **focus** or **secondary topic**. This explanation accounts well for the fact that, in the investigated languages, DOM starts from the only category that has retained case-marking, namely personal pronouns. Indeed, personal pronouns in dislocated constructions are suitable candidates for DOM to appear and spread, insofar as they are high on the animacy hierarchy and are highly topical (thus sharing two important features with subjects).

At this point, the question arises as to what the general function is of DOM. DOM could be assumed to **iconically** signal the fact that the direct object has non-typical pragmatic and semantic properties, in that, contrary to what is usually the case for direct objects, it has a high perceptual and cognitive **prominence** (Croft 1988: 174; Givón 1985: 206). This is confirmed by the low frequency of animate and definite objects in transitive clauses (Dubois 2003). The greater pragmatic “prominence” of overtly marked direct objects is determined by their significance at both the sentence and the discourse level:

- at the sentence level, overtly marked direct objects are more autonomous within the clause (for example in Persian, Lazard 2003: 4), i.e. they can be moved to virtually every position (unlike unmarked ones, which are less autonomous both syntactically and semantically; cf. the distinction between “distant” objects and “close” objects put forward by Lazard 2003);

member of a pair is positively specified for a given pragmatic feature, while the unmarked member is open to more than an interpretation”.

- at the discourse level, prominence is reflected by the (primary) topical status of overtly marked objects. This is in accordance with Givón’s proposal that “the more important an item is in the communication, the more distinct and independent coding expression it receives” (Givón 1985: 206).

As was shown in Section 3, the grammaticalization of the DOM construction can involve either its narrowing or its spread: in case of narrowing, only the prototypical items of the category are marked. Dislocated direct objects are highly topical and, in some languages, are therefore the only ones to be overtly marked. For these languages, topicality is thus the main parameter. In contrast, the spreading of DOM involves the gradual loss of the link with information structure: the information status of the entire construction is leveled out and the features relevant for marking to appear are merely referential properties such as animacy and/or definiteness.

From a diachronic point of view, it is interesting to consider instances from Latin texts where the preposition *ad* (whose basic meaning, like its Italian and French descendants revolves around motion towards a place) serves to introduce an *as-for* topic, as in (47) and (48):

(47) *Ad Dolabell-am, ut scrib-is, ita*
TOP Dolabella-ACC.SG.F as write.PRS-2SG so
puto faci-end-um
 believe.PRS.1SG do-GERUND-ACC.SG.N

“As for Dolabella, as you write, I think that we should act in this way”

(Cic. Att. 13, 10, 2; from Pensado 1995: 201)

(48) *Ad ea autem, quae*
TOP DEM.ACC.PL.N instead REL.ACC.PL.N

scrib-is *de* *testament-o*, *vide-b-is*
 write.PRS-2SG about will-ABL.SG see-FUT-2SG
quid *et* *quomodo*
 REL.ACC.SG.N and how

“With regard to what you say about the will, please consider what
 should be done and how” (Cic. Att. 11, 21, 1; from Pensado 1995: 201)

These construction types are likely to have been the starting point for the preposition to be used in Late Latin, first as a topic marker, subsequently as a recipient/beneficiary marker, and finally as a differential object marker (notice that these meanings, except for the differential object marker, coexist both in Latin and in Romance languages). The following path can be postulated:

- allative marker > topic marker > dative marker > (differential)
 object marker

This analysis provides further evidence for the idea that it is the high topical status of dative markers that triggers the reanalysis of these markers as markers of topical direct objects. Moreover, the triggering role of the topicality parameter is further documented by an (apparently) unusual usage found in some Italian dialects. For example, in Campidanese Sardinian, the topicalizing function of the preposition *a* has been extended to a prototypical topic function, i.e. the subject of an active clause (Putzu 2008: 412). This is illustrated in (49):

(49) *A* *chi* *arriidi* *urtimu*, *arriidi* *mellus*
 TOP who laugh:PRS.3SG last laugh:PRS.3SG best

“He who laughs the last, laughs best” (Putzu 2008: 412)

At first glance, this pattern seems to be common cross-linguistically. For

example, the original meanings of Persian *-râ* and Hindi *-ko* object markers were “goal”, “with respect to”. In accordance with the hypothesis just presented, these adpositions further developed into dative and accusative markers (cf. Lehmann 1995: 98, Lazard 2001: 875, among others). The same process is attested in other Iranian languages, such as Shugni and Parâči, where the current object markers probably once meant “as for” (Lazard 2001: 875), and in Tubu, a Nilo-Saharan language spoken in Sudan (König 2008: 41).

5. A comparative look

I will now turn to non-Romance languages in which DOM is strongly affected by the topicality of the direct object. I will begin by discussing Nikolaeva & Dalrymple’s (2006) proposal of secondary topic marking with particular regard to the data from Persian. This approach will be shown to be problematic for Persian data, and then it will be argued that further investigation is necessary to provide a general picture of DOM in this language. Subsequently, the situation in some Amazonian languages will be discussed, based on Zúñiga (2007), where topicality is regarded as the main parameter that triggers object marking.

5.1 Persian

DOM in Persian has often been claimed to be triggered by the topicality (cf. Dabir-Moghaddam 1992, Windfuhr 1987, among others). Following this line of research, Nikolaeva & Dalrymple (2006) have argued that DOM is a grammatical way of indicating the pragmatic role of secondary topics in Persian as well. Although this model is valid for the data on agreement from Uralic languages like Ostyak, it does not appear to be easily applicable to the data from other languages. In Nikolaeva & Dalrymple’s account, the Persian postposition *-râ* is analyzed as a

mark of secondary topicality (in line with a previous proposal of Dabir-Moghaddam 1992). Two observations about this explanation of Persian DOM as an instance of secondary topic marking can be made:

First, it is not entirely clear in what sense the constituents located at the left periphery of the sentence and cross-referenced by a clitic, as in (50), can be considered to be secondary topics; the dislocated NPs can correspond to a number of syntactic roles, i.e. direct object (50), indirect object (51), and oblique (52):

- (50) *unja-ro ne-mi-xa-m to be-bin-i-š*
 there-ACC NEG-DUR-want-1SG you SBJN-see-2SG-3S.PC
 “That place, I don’t want you to see it” (Mahootian 1997: 124)

- (51) *Irj-o pul be-heš be-d-e*
 Iraj-ACC money to-3S.PC IMPER-give-3SG
 “Iraj, give him money” (Mahootian 1997: 124)

- (52) *man-o beh-me mi-xand-e*
 I-ACC at-1SG IPVF-laugh-3SG
 “She laughed at me” (Karimi 1990: 143)

As noted above, the main function of left dislocations is to reintroduce or establish a new topic, the typical topical expression being an unaccented pronominal. (Lambrecht 1994:183).

Moreover, as discussed in Section 2.1.2, in Lambrecht’s model the dislocated NP announces the topic for the predication, while the clitic resumptive pronoun is the actual topic expression of the sentence. In this view, also adopted by Nikolaeva & Darlymple (2006), topical properties are defined based on referents: If both the dislocated element and the clitic denote the same referent, they cannot have different states in terms of topicality. For this reason, it is not possible to assert that *-râ* marking is restricted to secondary topics; the NP is quite clearly a primary topic

as in (50, 51, 52).

Examples are also found in which the postposition marks constituents that are not direct objects, such as temporal and spatial adverbials (53, 54, see Karimi 1990, Mahootian 1997: 121ff):¹⁷

- (53) *emšab-o Kamāl injā mi-mān-e*
tonight-ACC Kamal here IPVF-remain:PRS.3SG
“Tonight, Kamal is staying here” (Mahootian 1997: 121)

- (54) *ta xune-ro dovid-æm*
until house-ACC run.PST-1SG
“I ran home” (Karimi 1990: 143)

The examples above do not seem clear cases of secondary topic marking. In (53, 54), the information status of the constituents marked by *-râ* is quite different, because they are “frame setting topics” (Chafe 1976). As Chafe (1976) and Jacobs (2001) have noted, frame setting topics should be distinguished from “aboutness topics”. Whereas frame setting topics set the temporal, spatial, or hypothetical frames for which a proposition holds, aboutness topics are the presupposed part about which pieces of information are conveyed. The use of the same marker to introduce frame setting topics, datives, and overtly marked direct objects is well attested cross-linguistically. In Standard Italian and in Italian dialects (and Spanish as well, cf. Zúñiga 2007: 219), for example, a number of spatial and temporal expressions have the preposition *a*, e.g. *all’inizio* “at the beginning”, *all’entrata* “at the entrance”, *alle sei* “at six o’clock”. A similar situation seems to be found in some Amazonian languages, as will be shown in the next section.

The data presented in this section suggest that the crucial properties that govern

¹⁷ As noted by Karimi (1990) even possessors can be marked by *-râ*. For reason of brevity, this problem will not be dealt with here.

the distribution of DOM in Persian might be properties linked to topicality (in the sense of salience), rather than the status of individual constituents in terms of primary vs. secondary topics. Further research is however needed in order to provide a general picture of this phenomenon.

5.2 Amazonian languages

As observed in Zúñiga (2007), in Tariana (a North-Arawak language of the Amazon, Aikhenvald 2003) and in some Tucanoan languages DOM seems to be governed primarily by topicality. Data will be briefly presented in the following in support of the hypothesis discussed so far. Readers interested in further information on the areal dimension of the phenomenon are referred to Zúñiga (2007).

The Tucano object marker *-re* (and its allomorph *-de*, Zúñiga 2007: 216) is used only with referential direct objects and recipients, whereas generic direct objects are unmarked. The marker is also obligatory for pronouns and proper names. Interestingly, the case-marker *-re* can be used with temporal and spatial expressions, such as in (55) and (56):

- (55) *a'to-de, dō'ó-pi kãdi-gi dii-a-ti?*
 here-RE where-FOC sleep-NMLRZ.SF be-REC.PST-VIS.Q
 “Here (i.e. in the city), where do you sleep?” (Zúñiga 2007: 218)

- (56) *D'káa-de, bu'ê-dã!*
 today-RE study-IMPER
 “Today, let's study!” (Zúñiga 2007: 218)

Following Ramirez (1997), Zúñiga (2007) proposes that the possible link between the use of the same marker both on direct objects and datives is the meaning of *-re* as “about, with respect to” (Zúñiga 2007: 218), as in (57) and (58):

- (57) *Dũbĩo-de uũkũ-a-bã*

woman-RE talk-REC.PST-VIS.3PL

“They talked about the woman” (Zúñiga 2007: 218)

(58) *Yahá-'ke-de* *bi'-i* *ye'édôho*

steal-NMLZR.INAN.P.PFV-RE 2SG what

bãsí-sa-di?

know-PRS.NVIS-Q

“What do you know about the theft?” (Zúñiga 2007: 218)

Moreover, quoting Ramirez (1997), Zúñiga (2007) argues that the “use of *-re* with STEs (spatial and temporal expressions, GI) is an extension of its basic function: the counterpart of highly individuated, referential objects is the topicalization or discursive salience of STEs” (Zúñiga 2007). Object marking would thus appear to be related to topicality in this case as well.

Tariana seems to match the situation found in Tucano very closely. In her grammar, Aikhenvald (2003: 142) states that Tariana uses different case-marking depending on the topical status of non-subject constituents. Two object markers are found: the former, *-na*, is used only with pronominal expressions along with a cross-referencing prefix. This marker is used with a variety of semantic roles and relations, including direct objects, recipients, and gifts in ditransitive constructions and directionals (Aikhenvald 1994: 202; Aikhenvald 2003: 142).¹⁸ Interestingly enough, *-na* marks a “reason” relation, as in (59), where “the verb *hama* is strictly intransitive” (Aikhenvald 2003: 144):

(59) *diha* *nha* *ha-ni i* *hama-pida* *di-wa*

he they parent-M be.fed.up-REP 3SG.NF-enter

di-a *na-na*

¹⁸ Possessors are marked only if there is a part-whole relationship between the possessor and the possessed entity (Aikhenvald 2003: 144), as in Persian.

3SG.NF-go 3PL-REASON

“Their father got fed up because of them” (Aikhenvald 2003: 144)

The other object marker, *-nuku* (and its variant *-naku* used by elder speakers), is used with non-pronominal non-subject NPs. It originates from a former locative, still present in the related language Baniwa, where *-naku* is a locative case meaning “on/to the surface” (Zúñiga 2007). In this case, too, the marker is required for direct objects as well as for recipients and gifts in ditransitive constructions, provided that these are topical and referential or emphasized. The marker is also compulsory when the NP constitutes the topic of subsequent discourse (see Aikhenvald 1994: 206 ff.). Furthermore, *-nuku* may appear on temporal adverbials and directional NPs, as in (60) and (61):

(60) *diha depi-ta-nuku diha maku-ne*
he night-ADV-NUKU he maku-PL
mema-kade-pidana
NEG-sleep-NEG-PART

“This very night the Makus did not sleep” (Aikhenvald 1994: 208)

(61) *di-hwida-nuku di-hwa di-swa*
3SG.NF-head-NUKU 3SG.NF-fall 3SG.NF-stay
di:nu-pidana di-na
3SG.NF-kill-PART 3SG.NF-ACC

“He (the turtle) fell on his very head (of the jaguar) and killed him”
(Aikhenvald 1994: 208)

The Tariana topical non-subject marker matches exactly the functions of Tucano *-re*: Just as in Tucano, it is obligatory for pronouns and proper names, whereas it can be used with other non-subject constituents only if they are topical and definite. Moreover, it is interesting to note that Tariana exhibits different case-

marking on subjects/agents depending on contrastive focal status (Aikhenvald 2003: 140): non-focal subjects are unmarked, whereas focal or relevant newly introduced subjects/agents are marked with the suffix *-nhe*, *-ne*. The focal subject marker is also used to disambiguate “who did what as a marker of turn taking” (Aikhenvald 2003: 142) and never co-occurs with the topical non-subject marker *-nuku*. The distributional pattern of the two case-markers based on information structure properties is very rare. The important point, in this regard, is that Tariana seems to have developed and grammaticalized a case-system to explicitly mark grammatical functions when their discourse properties deviate from the prototype. In other words, since topicality is a typical feature of subjects/agents, when the two are focused they are overtly marked. By contrast, since direct objects are associated with either focus or secondary topic relations (i.e. they can have medium topicality, cf. Croft 1991: 155), they are overtly marked if they are highly topical.

Furthermore, in this case as well, the marker of topical and definite direct objects conveys a meaning of aboutness, as in Persian and in other Iranian languages. This lends further support to the view that topicality is the fundamental feature in explaining the marking of direct objects in some languages. Only topicality allows the same marker to be used throughout a variety of constructions, such as time and space adverbials, possessors, and reason relations.

6. Conclusions

This article has investigated the factors affecting the distribution of DOM in some Romance languages and the effects of information structure on the assignment of case marking on animate and definite direct objects. Unlike other Romance languages such as Spanish, in which topicality is no longer the main parameter triggering DOM, Northern Italian, Gallo-Italian dialects, Catalan and

French varieties exhibit a DOM system regulated mainly by the constituent's topical status. Moreover, the emergence of DOM might be explained as a grammaticalization process along two different paths: restriction to topical objects, as shown for Catalan, and extension to animate and definite objects regardless of their information status, as in Modern Sicilian and most likely Spanish. Some historical evidence is also provided regarding the extension of DOM from topical to non-topical objects. Furthermore, it has been argued that in the Romance languages taken into account, the use of case marking for topical objects originated from the need to signal the marked status of these objects, *contra* Nikolaeva & Dalrymple (2006)'s approach in which morphological marking is taken as a reflex of the secondary topicality of some direct objects. I argued, in particular, that the information status of overtly marked direct objects in these languages is more that of a primary topic. I therefore argued that DOM in these languages is said to be a strategy to signal the non-prototypicality of the direct objects, both at the information-structure and semantic levels. I also proposed that the link between topicality and DOM might be explained historically by the fact that the source of object markers is represented by adpositions meaning "with respect to" and "about", as in Persian and Tucano. This fact would account for the problematic cases found in Persian, Tucano, Tariana, and Romance languages, in which the object marker is used to mark temporal and spatial expressions.

Abbreviations

1	first person	M	masculine
2	second person	N	neuter
3	third person	NEG	negative
ABL	ablative	NF	non-feminine
ABS	absolutive	NMRLZ	nominalizer
ACC	accusative/obj. marker	NOM	nominative
ADV	adverbial	PART	discourse particle
AUX	auxiliary	PC	pronominal clitic
CLIT	clitic	PFV	perfective
CLIT.SUBJ	subject clitic	PL	plural
COND	Conditional	PRS	present
DAT	dative	PST	past
DUR	durative	PTCP	participle
ERG	ergative	Q	question
F	feminine	REC	recent
FAC	factual	REL	relative
FOC	focus	REP	reportative
GER	gerundive	SBJN	subjunctive
IMPER	imperative	TOP	topic
IMPERS	impersonal	TRANS	transitive
INTR	intransitive	VIS	visual evidence
IPVF	imperfective		

Texts used

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